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NSC BRIEFING

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SOVIET DISARMAMENT MOVE?

1. After a two-and-one-half hour Moscow meeting with Khrushchev on 9 May, a stray French "delegation" (led by National Assembly deputy Emanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie, a vice-president of the World Peace Council) quoted Khrushchev to the AFP correspondent in Moscow as saying, "The Soviet Union is preparing to announce shortly a very important decision. Whether the Western powers accept it or not, the peoples will then understand on which side the genuine defenders of peace are to be found." Deputy Vigerie told the AFP reporter he got the impression that the "decision" would be for a reduction in Soviet armed forces and military expenditures. AFP broke this story at 8:30 p.m., EDT, last night. No Soviet announcement has yet been made public.

2. Remarks by Khrushchev to British and American officials during the recent Soviet UK visit suggest that the USSR will confront the US and its Western allies in the near future with a public challenge to make substantial reciprocal cuts in conventional armed forces. In his talk with Governor Stassen on 24 April, Khrushchev asked whether the United States would reduce its armed forces should the USSR cut its forces by one million men and make a corresponding reduction in conventional armaments.

3. In addition to such a proposal to cut armed forces, Moscow may also call for a 15% reduction in military budgets, a halt to further thermonuclear weapons tests, and a ban on nuclear weapons in German territory. The Soviet leaders may also attempt to place

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the Western powers on the defensive by proposing a major reduction, perhaps by one-half, of four power forces in Germany. Khrushchev told Staassen that the USSR was ready to make a beginning toward disarmament by reducing its forces in Germany without waiting for a solution of the German question.

4. Khrushchev's reported remarks to the French "delegation" suggest that, while the USSR's "decision" will be in the form of a proposal to the West for reciprocal reductions in armed forces, armaments and budgets, Moscow may intend in any case to carry out unilateral cuts in its overall military establishment, military spending, and troop strength in East Germany, regardless of the West's reaction to the proposal.

5. A proposal for reciprocal cuts, followed by a unilateral Soviet reduction, would be consistent with the pattern of other recent unilateral Soviet actions designed to portray the US as unresponsive to Soviet peace overtures. Earlier moves along these lines include last year's much publicized 640,000 Soviet troop reduction, and Bulgaria's offer of a friendship treaty to the United States.

6. A dramatic move such as that hinted at by Khrushchev would provide further evidence that the Soviet leaders are not interested in serious negotiations for an enforceable disarmament agreement. It would strengthen the impression that they conceive of their disarmament policy as an instrument for advancing broader foreign policy objectives. They probably believe a unilateral cut, following efforts in the UN Disarmament Subcommittee to create the impression of Soviet concessions to Western views, will lead Western governments to curtail military spending and reduce armed forces even in the absence of a formal East-West arms agreement.

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